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PUBLIC EDUCATION. *Nov 25 1839*

*For A. B. Brooke*

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## S E R M O N,

PREACHED IN THE

PARISH CHURCH OF HEMEL HEMPSTEAD,

ON SUNDAY, DEC. 22, 1839.

BY

J. H. BROOKE MOUNTAIN, B.D.

“ Religion without Education is too simple to be safe, and Education  
without Religion is too subtle to be sound.”

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SOME of the Congregation who heard the following Sermon, having expressed their opinion that its circulation in a printed form, at the present crisis, may be advantageous to the interests of Religious Education, the Author feels it his duty to neglect no means, however trifling, which can tend to diffuse sound notions on this most essential subject.

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A  
SUMMARY  
OF THE  
WRITINGS OF LACTANTIUS.

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## S E R M O N.

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1 THESS. v. 21.

“ Prove all things ; hold fast that which is good.”

THERE is a daily growing tendency, in “ the Spirit of the Age,” to divest religion of all controul over the practical principles of mankind *collectively* and *individually*.

*Collectively*, we are now told, men are to have *no* religion : for this is the plain meaning of the trite fallacy that “ religion has nothing to do with politics.” The salt of the earth is not designed to counteract the corruption of society in the mass ! *Individually*, the same notion is somewhat differently expressed. Moral worth, it is said, must not be estimated by speculative opinions. Men are not to be judged by their creed, but by their conduct. And so forth.

Upon this system, the public teachers of religion are prohibited, by public opinion, from a very wide field of instruction, which, as ministers of the gospel, they are strictly bound to cultivate. They are censured as political preachers, if they presume to teach the duties which men owe to society, in the

capacities of subjects and citizens ; and they are condemned as uncharitable bigots, when they inculcate the scriptural doctrines of unity in religion and church communion : they are visited with reproaches and revilings whenever they venture, in a conscientious discharge of their responsibility, to point out the mischievous and impious character of fashionable opinions, and prevailing modes of argument.

But "woe be to us if we preach not the gospel," "through evil report and good report : " woe be to us if we shrink from a fearless, yet candid and charitable, avowal of those great truths, which are "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever," whilst "the fashion of this world passeth away."

Among many subjects of Christian edification, thus interdicted by "the Spirit of the Age," which will bear no contradiction, is the important topic of public education : and certainly it does require some portion of moral intrepidity to face the charges of intolerance, of the love for darkness, of selfish interest and tyrannical design, which are poured upon us the moment we dare to insinuate that the basis of all Education, public and private, *ought* to be, and *must* be, if human virtue and human happiness is its object, based upon the Christian religion. It is however the unquestionable duty of a "good soldier of Jesus Christ," to disregard all this shower of fiery darts, and to set before those whom he is appointed to instruct, the eternal and unchangeable principles of truth, "whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear ;"

and he is to do this, as, on the one hand, without any pusillanimous fear of the resentment he may provoke, so, on the other, without prejudice, passion or exaggeration.

I shall, therefore, beg your attention, and your indulgence—I will bespeak the forbearance of any who may dissent from me—whilst I endeavour, however feebly, to fulfil, what appears to me, my indispensable duty, in laying down those principles of education which the gospel of Jesus Christ enforces, and which His *true* church, in every age, has laboured to carry out in practice.

In order to lay a distinct foundation for these evangelical principles of education, I must, in the first instance, be permitted to point out the fallacy and the pernicious tendency of those which “the Spirit of the Age” is working to introduce in their room. The prevailing error is, that the fashionable system is *new*; that it is the result of increasing intelligence, and more extended information; whereas, in truth, it affords a striking example of the adage, “there is nothing *new* under the sun!” So far from being a step in advance of our former position, it is a retrogradation to a point occupied before the light of Christianity broke upon the world; and not *the first* retrogradation either! The Gospel found men in a high degree of *intellectual* cultivation—(a degree which we shall not readily surpass,)—combined with a deplorable state of moral darkness. The Catechists of the Church, in its pure and active condition, that is for

five or six centuries, reformed this false system of education, and in their numerous and ably conducted schools, they introduced a complete training in that science, of all others confessedly the most important, the science "*how to live*:" how to live so as to secure our own ultimate happiness, by contributing as largely as possible to the happiness of others: and the axioms of this science they founded, not upon utilitarian investigations, but upon the will of an all-wise and all-good Deity. But as religion became corrupt, and consequently lost much of its just and salutary influence upon the mass of society, men gradually relapsed, in what are, somewhat presumptuously, called "the dark ages," into a duller and more uncouth form of the ancient errors, and began again, in the schools, to cultivate the sharpness of the intellect; and to neglect the culture of the affections, and the regulation of the passions, by the rules of Christian duty.

On this point let us hear the complaint of an eloquent and profound scholar, who lived at the close of the period to which I am referring. "The times in which we live (says H. Stephens) labour under many complaints in the education and training of youth, but especially under this most fatal and grievous malady, that the essential part of education, in which the foundation should be laid, is wholly neglected and left out of the account by some teachers, and is by others regarded in the light of an appendage or trapping. For some impart to their



pupils not one jot of the dogmas of Christianity; whilst others, who omit no nicety of perfection in mere human science, instruct them in divinity, as it were in passing, and as opportunity offers, disparaging its sanctity."

At the Reformation a new era commenced in education, or rather, in this, as in other matters, the Church reverted to the principles and practice of primitive times. The will of God, and the consequent duties and interests of man, were made once more the leading subjects of public instruction; and the State, by enacting that no one should teach a school without the licence of the bishop, secured, as far as in it lay, the soundness and uniformity of the doctrines conveyed in the education of the people.

But as the Reformation became more and more perplexed by the abuses of private judgment, it was found impracticable to maintain this salutary check. Dissent reared its hydra heads, and demanded, as an unalienable right, to instruct its own disciples, in its own way; and since the first race of Dissenters adopted all the creeds, and many of the articles of the reformed Church, the rule was the more readily relaxed in their favour; and having once been virtually conceded to them, it became worse than nugatory to enforce it upon members of the Church. But though the rule was abandoned, its spirit long survived, and, God be praised! still survives, in most of the great seminaries of learning, and in the majority of parochial schools, though with a weakened force, and waning lustre, down to the present day.

The cry, therefore, which is now raised, and the fashion which threatens to prevail for the secularisation of education, by depriving it of what is called "the sectarian spirit," that is, of all distinct religious doctrines, is nothing new. It is reverting, for the *third* time, to a system which has *twice* before been tried, found wanting, and abandoned.

The system, in effect, is, to substitute for the principle of religious duty, as the spring of human action, a refined and enlightened and calculating selfishness; in other words, to take the result of our own calculations, instead of the rule of God's Will. "Not contented," says Mr. Gladstone, "with excluding religion from the province of government, 'the Spirit of the Age' struggles, with not less zeal, to introduce, as its substitute, education: that is to say, the cultivation of the intellect of the natural man, instead of the heart and affections of the spiritual man—the abiding in the life of Adam, instead of passing into the life of Christ."

"The modern supposed improvements," observed Scott, "of science, philosophy, and human reasonings, carry large numbers as far from Christ, and from the apostolical doctrine, as popery itself does." And, had he lived to this day, he might have added, *much further*; inasmuch as the total abandonment of religion is worse than its partial corruption.

The advocates of this dangerous system are not, however, in general, to be suspected of a deliberate design to supersede Christianity. They are the short-sighted tools of master spirits. The plausible pre-

text for the omission of fundamental and essential truths from the education of the people, is a plan of comprehension to include all denominations of Christianity. All denominations ! But a moment's reflection will convince any reasonable mind that this is nothing less than a covert mode of shutting out Christianity altogether. Such a comprehension *can* have *no* limits. It has indeed been attempted to exclude Socinians. But this is in manifest contravention of the principle, and could never be maintained. If you draw any line of demarcation at all, you admit, at once, the necessity for exclusion to preserve true doctrine, and you justify all the precautions recommended by the Church.

Besides, how will you hold to any rule of exclusion the sects who profess no creed, and have no fixed principles ? We hear indeed much of the three denominations of Protestant Dissenters ; and the leaders of this union are much more intolerant towards the sects not included within their pale than the Church is ; but of the three denominations, it is notorious that one, *still called Presbyterian*, has become *Unitarian* ; and that pure Deists are admitted into its councils. If therefore the system of comprehension be attempted at all, it is vain to set any limits to it. You must admit all men, and all opinions, without restriction, and throw open the doors to the infidel and the socialist.

But this would be gradual. Some limits, however inconsistently and even unjustly, would be set in the

first instance, and would yield by degrees to the pressure of opinion, and to the evident impossibility of defining them strictly. The omission of one point of discipline and doctrine would follow after another; the Christian motives of action would be left out of sight, and Christian rules of conduct would meet with objectors who have framed their social system upon the calculations of political economy, instead of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. For let it not be too hastily taken for granted that all mankind are agreed respecting practice; and that our differences of opinion respect only speculative topics. It is not so. Without adducing the insane abominations of socialism, it is obvious, to a very cursory observer, that men of different shades of doctrine, all professing to make the Scriptures the rule of faith and of practice, have adopted various and even opposite views of public, if not of private, duty; that one sincere Christian denounces, as profane and dishonest, the very course of conduct which another extols as self-devoted and independent; that the latter condemns as oppressive and unjust, what the former holds to be an indispensable part of the duty which he owes to his Church and country. And these topics are neither so few, nor so inconsiderable, that they could safely be left out of a course of moral instruction, even if it were possible to hope that the party spirit of the age would not render them unnecessarily prominent. It is, I think, sufficiently clear that the proposed system of compre-

hension will resemble the toes of the image in Nebuchadnezzar's dream—"partly iron, and part miry clay," and that the incoherent materials must speedily fall asunder, and the whole fabric become a heap of disorder.

There is also another and a vital objection to the comprehensive system, in the danger—I consider it something more than danger—that the necessity which it imposes of passing over slightly all those doctrines, however essential, upon which mankind are not agreed, should train up the youthful mind in an habitual indifference to religious and moral truth; and that instead of "searching the Scriptures daily whether those things be so;" they should acquire the habit of "caring for none of those things." Will not the art of reading distinctly and fluently, for example, be thought of more importance than the doctrine of the Atonement, by children who hear all persons of all denominations daily and hourly inculcating one, whilst they studiously keep the other out of sight? Will not writing and arithmetic be looked upon as more essential acquirements than prayer and praise?

It is no answer to this objection, that the parents and the ministers are left at liberty to teach their own peculiar doctrines out of the school. The school is the place of education, and if the school is not conducted upon religious principles, the education cannot be religious. We know that the parents of the poor generally *do not*, and to any considerable

extent, many of them *cannot*, instruct their children in religion. They leave this duty, unhappily too much, to the clergyman and the schoolmaster. But the clergyman's opportunity, his *only* opportunity, of discharging this important function, is in the school, and during school hours; and if it cannot be done *then*, it can never be done at all.

I am aware that it is proposed to allow religious teachers an opportunity of instructing children of their own denomination, at certain hours, and under certain restrictions, in the comprehensive schools. But this concession has been reluctantly made to parry the indignation that was roused by the incautiously abrupt abandonment of all doctrinal instruction; and I hope I am not uncharitable in believing that it must have been made with the assurance, that it can never be carried out into practice. Let any reasonable person, of the slightest experience in parochial education, attempt to frame to himself the details of such a system; and he will speedily come to the conclusion, that no "sincere milk of the word" can ever be imbibed in the Babel of univers toleration, and universal indifference.

I shall not now notice other, and grave, objections, to a scheme of which the only merit, in my mind, is, that it cannot possibly last. Let us turn from this unpleasing side of the question, to consider briefly the true and scriptural principles of religious education, based on the practice of the Christian Church in its best ages.

“The true excellence of man,” observes one of the most thoughtful of modern writers, “appears to be *moral*, not intellectual.” The approaches towards a higher nature, and a nearer knowledge of the Creator, are to be made by moral cultivation; and this culture is, in effect, the best training for the intellect also. Mere science may sharpen the powers, and expand the faculties, but it does not tend to improve the judgment, nor to mature those habits of mind upon which the regulation of conduct, and consequently the happiness of mankind, really depends: whereas the knowledge of God, and of our relations to Him, and to each other as social beings, and of all the duties which spring from those relations, not only tends to purify the heart, and exalt the affections, but, in its operation, exercises and strengthens the more exalted powers of the human mind, and produces real tone and dignity of character. And this truth is particularly applicable to the case of persons whose lot it is to earn their daily bread by the labour of their hands. The little time which such men have to bestow upon intellectual pursuits, if it be devoted to acquire a smattering in the practical sciences, renders them only shallow, self-conceited, and mischievous; whilst, by absorbing all their leisure, it deprives them of the only knowledge which is really valuable to immortal beings, and leaves them in utter ignorance of the Will of God, of their own high destiny, and of those duties by the performance of which that destiny is to be fulfilled.

But, if the brief opportunities for learning, afforded to the labourer and the mechanic, be employed on the noble science of moral and religious truth, they will be raised at once in the scale of being to a level with the more affluent classes, who are compelled, by the necessities of their station, to bestow much of their time upon their more intellectual but still professional and secular pursuits.

Following out this view, then, we hold, that the true way to raise our fellow-creatures, who labour for us, to their natural level with ourselves, is not by an impracticable attempt to make them adepts in science, leaving them in moral and religious darkness, but by imparting to them as much as possible of that kind of mental improvement upon which we feel that our own superiority rests,—that is, a more extended and accurate knowledge of God and man, which I take to be only another form of expression for a better acquaintance with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Clergy of the Church of England have been charged with maintaining, that all sciences should be taught from the Bible. This is wilful misrepresentation. But certainly we do contend that the Bible contains the noblest of all sciences,—“all that it imports man most to know.” Hence we desire to make the Bible the ground-work of public education. Here we lay our foundation. And to this extent we have many coadjutors who are willing to build upon the same common ground.



But when we begin to raise our superstructure, it is "the beginning of strife." *We* go back to the primitive system of teaching by Catechisms. It is manifestly impossible to give children a connected view of the contents of the Bible without abridging them. A summary of those various doctrines and rules of duty which lie dispersed in the Sacred Volume, is indispensable to systematic instruction. An abridgment of its history appears equally necessary to fix the leading points in the memory. An explanation of ancient usages, and modes of speech, is essential to a right understanding of the whole. A comparison of correlative passages is the only safe guidance in cases of obscurity and difficulty.

All this seems undeniable. And if we admit this, we, in effect, admit the necessity for an interpreter of Holy Scripture. And the office of interpreting the Word of God is evidently one of such vast importance, and awful responsibility, that we do not see how any human being can presume to take it upon himself. In truth, no human being ought to do so. The Scripture itself has appointed its own interpreter. That interpreter is the Church, kept in check, and prohibited from adding to the Word or taking from it, by the right bestowed, the duty imposed upon the people, of referring every thing back to Scripture. In the Catechisms, in the Articles, in the Creeds of the Church; we have the authorized interpretation and summary of the Bible. They are not intended to supersede the use of the Bible, much

less to modify its contents, but, on the contrary, to enable the people to examine the Sacred Writings with advantage, by affording them a short and clear Table of Contents, lucid in its arrangement, and plain in its illustration. Here we come to narrower ground. We are assailed by a host of objectors, and faintly supported by the great body who still adhere to us, not so much, I verily believe, from disaffection to our system, as from ignorance and inconsideration of the subject.

But here we must take our stand. Not only must the Bible be the ground-work of education; but the Creeds and Articles which embody its doctrines, which possess the stamp of truth, and the sanction of primitive antiquity, must be adopted to convey its force and meaning in a condensed form. Nor can we consent, under any imaginable circumstances, to forego that admirable "short Catechism," the legacy of our spiritual Fathers, the Reformers of the Church of England; or to exclude from the course of religious instruction the explanations of that Liturgy, which is to form the young mind to habits of devotion, and to become its means of communion with God. We cannot allow our scholars, (as far as in us lies to prevent it,) to grow up in the ruinous habit of using forms of prayer without understanding; and we must, therefore, make it part of their education to learn the meaning of the Book of Common-Prayer.

We can consistently admit of no compromise, we

can assent to no plan of comprehension, which goes to deprive us of the least of these advantages. We do *not desire* to *compel* those persons, who unhappily misunderstand and object to our system, to entrust *us* with the education of their children. We do *not desire* to throw any obstacle in the way of their educating their own children in their own way. But we *do insist*, (woe be to us if we fail to *insist*, and to "*contend earnestly*,") that the youth of the Church of England shall be brought up in its principles, trained in its doctrines, formed in its practical duties, made perfect in all "the nurture and admonition of the Lord."

That this has hitherto been done very imperfectly we acknowledge, and deeply lament; that, with all the pains which we are now taking, it will still be done imperfectly, we have too much cause, from past experience, to apprehend; but we shall never consent to the abandonment of a sound and Scriptural system of education, on the ground of that imperfection which attaches to all human performances. We will do the best we can in this world, and trust to attain perfection in a better.

The children of our Church shall be gathered together under the wing of our re-<sup>verend</sup> Mother, and taught the way of life under her eye. Established, *or not*, by the law and constitution of our country, she stands on higher ground, and will not "fear what man can do unto her." The Church to which we belong, is the mystical and visible body of the Lord.

Its members are, not the clergy only, but the whole of its people, who have, no less than their ministers, their proper share in its privileges, and in its government; and, if they rightly understood their position, a common interest in its preservation. Deeply, indeed, are they concerned in maintaining, in improving, in extending, its system of religious education. On their growing sense of this vital interest we rely for support. But supported, or deserted, we are firm to our cause. We *may* be defeated; we *may* be overwhelmed for a season in that delusive impetuous torrent which wears the smoothness of liberality on its surface, whilst it gathers the dark waters of infidelity below; but, defeated and overwhelmed, we will be found *faithful*: faithful, and protesting to the last against the restless "Spirit of the Age," "the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience." There is, however, no ground for despair. Let us do our duty zealously, cheerfully, and hopefully. We have many encouragements, many blessings, for which to be thankful; for which we may well praise God whilst "we humbly hope for more." Let *us do our duty*. "God shall bless us, and all the ends of the world shall fear Him."

THE END.